



**TAKING MIGRANTS'  
PROJECTS SERIOUSLY:  
TEMPORARY MIGRATION, INTEGRATION  
AND EXIT OPTIONS**

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CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2011/34



**CARIM**  
**Euro-Mediterranean Consortium**  
**for Applied Research on International Migration**

**Analytic and Synthetic Notes**  
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**Taking migrants' projects seriously:  
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## **CARIM**

The Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM) was created at the European University Institute (EUI, Florence), in February 2004 and co-financed by the European Commission, DG AidCo, currently under the Thematic programme for the cooperation with third countries in the areas of migration and asylum.

Within this framework, CARIM aims, in an academic perspective, to observe, analyse, and forecast migration in Southern & Eastern Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Countries (hereafter Region).

CARIM is composed of a coordinating unit established at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS) of the European University Institute (EUI, Florence), and a network of scientific correspondents based in the 17 countries observed by CARIM: Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Palestine, Senegal, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey.

All are studied as origin, transit and immigration countries. External experts from the European Union and countries of the Region also contribute to CARIM activities.

CARIM carries out the following activities:

- Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan migration database;
- Research and publications;
- Meetings of academics and between experts and policy makers;
- Migration Summer School;
- Outreach.

The activities of CARIM cover three aspects of international migration in the Region: economic and demographic, legal, and socio-political.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: [www.carim.org](http://www.carim.org)

*For more information:*

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Temporary migration has been a feature of migratory experiences throughout history, but is relatively less studied and understood than permanent migration. However, after being considered as a failure in the European experience, temporary migration and guest workers programs are again discussed in many *fora* with a revived interest. It is hoped that temporary migration programs may benefit economically both sending and receiving countries (by providing income through remittances, alleviating the brain drain problem and exporting surplus labour for the former, by providing workers to fill labour shortages without increasing rates of permanent immigration for the latter), as well as benefitting the migrants themselves; facilitating temporary migration has been described as a win-win-win migration policy. Moreover, there are some indications that temporary migration as a phenomenon may be on the rise. There are also however strong indications that the potential benefits of temporary migration may be ripped only through careful governance of the phenomenon. These developments make the issue of the successful management of temporary migration, and of the integration of temporary migrants, urgent.

The main limitation of current discussion of temporary migration is, in our opinion, their focus on the institutional dimension and the assumption that states, or supra-national institutions, are the main actors involved in the shaping and characteristics of migration. Migrants themselves are usually conceived of as passive recipients of the programs whose choices and aims are shaped by institutional design. Institutional arrangements defining migration options are inevitably crucial; however, the migrants' own motivations and aims in migrating are of fundamental importance in defining their migratory experience and, thus, should be key concerns in designing effective migration policies. Without taking these migration projects into due consideration policies will necessarily misfire. Temporary migration projects have very definite characteristics that are peculiar to this kind of experience and require specific policy responses.

Temporary migration projects consist in migrating to a foreign country for a limited span of time, with the purpose of sending money home or acquiring knowledge and expertise needed to advance specific aims and long-term goals once back in one's country (children's education, building a house, supporting a family, starting a new business activity, etc.). The decision to migrate is usually motivated by greater economic opportunity in the host country, but it specifically aims to take advantage of this differential to achieve personal ends in the society of origin; the aim is never to create a whole new life in the host society, regardless of the specific time limitations on their visa, which may, or may not be temporary. The "temporariness" is in the intent rather than necessarily in the institutional structure.

Thus, temporary migrants engage with the host society in a distinctive way in many areas. First, temporary migrants behave differently in the labour market. They tend to work for longer hours than they would in their home country and, on average, for longer than non-migrants. They also tend to maximize participation in the labour force when measured per household. Their economic strategies involve a higher rate of savings when compared to permanent migrants and natives, as well as higher remittances when compared to permanent migrants. Moreover, an analysis of temporary migrants' remittance patterns and migration duration reveals that temporary migrants move to achieve a specific savings target, often the result of an agreement between family members. Their investment in human capital may be expected not to be specific to the host country but rather to be aimed at obtaining greater returns in the home country. Temporary migrants tend to accept lower paid jobs than permanent migrants, and their earnings tend to be lower than those of nationals and of the more experienced migrants who are settling permanently in the country.

Second, as part of a strategy aimed at maximising savings, they tend to choose cheap—often shared—housing, sometimes living in dramatically sub-standard conditions. Consumption is deferred until the time of return, and a life of austerity is pursued while the migrant is still in the host country.

Third, temporary migrants display reduced engagement with the host society at the level of civic, political and social participation. They do not participate in the political life of the receiving country

and do not entertain plans to advance their social and economic conditions in the host society. Socially, they invest little time in making themselves at home in the new country, and there is little chance or willingness on the part of these migrants to build stable relationships. These paths, not being aimed at permanent settlement, generally do not and cannot lead to happy endings as a matter of social integration, rootedness, and even economic success in the receiving countries.

Temporary migration projects, in fact, typically entail a high degree of *vulnerability* for the people involved in them. First, temporary migrants are exposed to the losses which may derive from the failure of their projects (an inability to complete one's project for lack of the necessary resources or the difficulty of permanently returning home due to the loss of a connection with one's original community, often including one's closest family). Second, engaging in this kind of migration project, means acquiring a lesser status and a marginal position within the receiving society, even when better living and working conditions and full inclusion are formally accessible.

Even access to citizenship rights would be insufficient to solve the problem: the effectiveness of civil, social and political rights is grounded on a web of economic and social preconditions (e.g. practices of political mobilisation and activism, linguistic and social skills, local networks and connections) that are simply lacking in the case of temporary migrants. The same is true for many forms of legal protections against exploitive or demeaning work conditions. In order to be effective, such measures need to be supported by the active capacity and willingness of the workers themselves to make use of them, which often presuppose skills and social networks that temporary migrants do not have the time or the intention to build.

Temporary migrants may therefore find themselves stuck within a failed migration project, unable to either return or integrate within the host society. This is why the policy response to temporary migration projects of this type should have as a primary aim not integration as such but rather the provision of a substantive *exit* option at any stage in their migration project, as an effective legal protection against duress and other risks deriving from their vulnerable position,

The exit option should have two separate channels, integration into the host society for those migrants who desire it, but also a set of special rights aimed at the specific type of migration project we have been discussing.

Various measures could be put in place in order to achieve the distinctive goals of temporary migrants and make their rights effective: being able not only to change jobs but also to return whenever they wish would provide temporary migrants guarantees that conventional social rights, aimed toward local workers, might be unable to provide; temporary immigrants could be allowed to divert part of their income taxes and social security payments to private health insurance or other forms of social guarantee to be used in their home countries; pension and social security benefit portability could be granted; programs could be developed to further the establishment of the returnees' private business in the sending countries; special funds could be created for voluntary repatriation; forms of savings and money transfers could be established that are specifically devoted to investments back in countries of origin; finally, other legal provisions could be arranged to make frequent visits to, and long-distance interactions with, home countries possible, in order to keep ties to the sending society alive.

Second, these special rights should express the public recognition of the particular conditions and life plans of temporary migrants. Setting up special rights for temporary migrants, especially in a context in which naturalisation and full inclusion were made available to those who wished to migrate on a permanent basis, could make explicit that the partial exclusion and marginality of the people involved is meant to be temporary and is voluntary. Together with the effective availability of an exit option, this might have important implications for the social status of the migrants involved, who would no longer be perceived as helpless second-class *citizens*, but would be viewed in a similar way to other foreigners, like tourists, diplomats or business people, whose equality of status is secured not

by their full inclusion within the host society but by the recognition of their special position and the public awareness of their contingent and temporary relation to that society.

These special rights may require extensive co-operation with the migrants' countries of origin, which may be achieved through bi-lateral, multi-lateral and even global agreements, and there might be an important role to be played in their implementation by international and supranational institutions.